

**THE
BIBLICAL
STRUCTURE
OF REALITY**

The Invisible God: “I AM”

The central declaration of the Scriptures is that God *is*. The constant affirmation of the Scriptures is that God *acts*.

It has always been a wonder to me that some men can read the Bible right through and leave God out of it. That is a tremendous feat of intellectual excision. Everything is attributed to nature and man; nothing is attributed to God. The presupposition behind it is that there is no God. It requires a deliberate and selective blindness that screens out much of what the Bible is about.

If a man reads the Bible this way, he fails completely to understand it. As a record of events, the Bible goes beyond the telling of the event to reveal what lies behind the event. More precisely, it goes beyond the event to tell who—whose intelligence and will—lies unseen behind the event.

The Bible asserts, uniformly and from beginning to end, that there are different levels of intelligent and active life: beasts, man, angels, demons, Satan, God. More are unseen than are seen. All but the beasts are intelligent agents whose actions profoundly affect human history. To smash them all down to a single level of existence—the natural—is to read the Bible with resolute unintelligence.

The intelligent way to read the Bible is not to lump everything together without discrimination, assigning to man or to nature the acts of God. The intelligent and discriminate way to read the Bible is to assign the acts of man to man, the acts of Satan to Satan, the acts

of God to God, the acts of angels to angels, and the acts of demons to demons. There are events today that are not intelligible apart from the biblical structure of reality.

The central declaration of the Scriptures is that God is. When God commissioned Moses to lead the people of Israel, Moses wondered if the people would recognize his commission as genuinely divine. God said to Moses, "Say this to the people of Israel: 'I AM has sent me to you'" (Exodus 3:14, RSV).

Through the Prophet Isaiah God said, "For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things not yet done" (Isaiah 46:9-10, RSV).

"In the beginning God . . ." are the first words of the Bible. Look at the first chapter of Genesis: "And God said. . ." "And God saw. . ." "And God made. . ." "And God called. . ." "And God set. . ." "So God created. . ." "And God blessed them. . ." "So God created man. . ." "And God saw everything that He had made, and behold, it was very good." The Bible is in large part an account of God in action.

The God of the Scriptures is a God of intelligent, purposeful, and efficient activity. He is the God who acts—who acts in human history. He is the God who speaks, and the signature of His divinity is that what He speaks far in advance is fully acted out in history.

In Genesis, and throughout the Bible, we see God exercising attributes of volition and intelligence and personality and speech of which man is capable on a diminished scale, because man is made in the image of God.

There are scholars who scoff at this as "an anthropomorphic God," perversely implying that man has simply imagined a god in man's own image. That is a great lie. They fail to grasp that God deliberately speaks to man about Himself in terms understandable to man. When the infinite God speaks to finite man, He speaks in terms measured to the mind and experience of man, just as a parent in speaking to a child brings his words and illustrations within the range of a child's comprehension. If God is like man it is because the faculties with which man is endowed are in major respects Godlike.

Genesis declares that "God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness, and let them have dominion. . . .' So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. And God blessed them . . ." (Genesis 1:26-28, RSV). God endowed the first man Adam with attributes of will and intelligence and speech, so that man was like his Creator.

Man was made in the image of God, but sin entered the human race

and man is now a badly marred image of God. Psalm 82:6 says, “*You are gods, and all of you are children of the Most High. But you shall die like men . . .*” (KJV).

The Invisible God

The Bible says that “God is a spirit” (John 4:24, KJV). He is invisible and He is immortal (1 Timothy 1:17).

The invisible God has expressed Himself in the physical creation. His creative hand is seen in the natural order. Romans 1:20 says, “Ever since the creation of the world His invisible nature, namely, His eternal power and deity, have been clearly seen in the things that have been made” (COM).

God is a spirit, invisible to the eye of man, and He dwells on the spiritual plane. He is supernatural—that is, above nature. All that we see in the natural realm, from the intricate design of the atom to the great balanced wheels of the stars and galaxies, is the product of God’s creative genius and His infinite power. Nature is His handiwork. The Milky Way alone is a system of over a hundred billion—yes, billion—stars!

“No one has ever seen God” (John 1:18). He cannot be discovered in any way other than by His own self-revelation made to man at times and by the means of His own choosing. The Scriptures—the sum of revelation after revelation given to Hebrew men over many centuries—are the appointed means that God uses to convey to mankind the truth about who He is, what His purposes are, and about the intelligent forces that operate in the supernatural realm.

God commenced His public revelation of Himself with Abraham and continued and expanded it through Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, David, the prophets, the apostles and other New Testament writers.

A man may learn something *about* God through teaching, but he only comes to *know* God by a direct, personal revelation to himself.

Jacob had learned about God and about the acts of God from his fathers, but he did not know God until God revealed Himself to Jacob. That is the difference between head knowledge and heart knowledge. A man may be told all about a certain young woman—her birthplace, her background, her schooling, her character, her activities—and he may have a very complete and accurate *concept* of what she is like, but it is not until he meets her that he begins to know her as she really is.

Jacob made a long journey from his father’s house to his uncle’s house. Chapter 28 of Genesis says, “Jacob left Beersheba, and went toward Haran. And he came to a certain place, and stayed there that night, because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of the place, he

put it under his head and lay down in that place to sleep. And he dreamed that there was a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven; and behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending upon it! And behold, the Lord stood above it and said, 'I am the Lord, the God of Abraham your father, and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and to your descendants. . . . Behold I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land. . . .'

"Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, 'Surely the Lord is in this place, and *I did not know it.*' And he was afraid and said, 'How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God and this is the gate of heaven'" (RSV). Jacob named that place Bethel, "the house of God."

It was, by all appearances, an entirely ordinary place when Jacob stopped there to rest on his journey. The sun had set, darkness had settled over the land, and Jacob could find no shelter or comfort except a stone for his pillow. God was invisible to Jacob's eye there. The place did not impress him. He took a stone, lay down, and went to sleep. Bethel was different only because God chose at that place, on that night, to reveal Himself to Jacob.

Jacob sensed nothing of the presence of God by his own faculties at that place—"the Lord is in this place, and *I did not know it*"—until God deliberately broke through the unseen veil that divides the natural from the supernatural and revealed Himself to Jacob there. Then that ordinary place seemed "awesome . . . the house of God . . . the gate of heaven."

Jacob could have strained his natural faculties to their utmost and not have discerned anything more about that place than its physical attributes. The natural senses cannot penetrate into the supernatural at any time. They are stone dumb to the presence of God, or angels, or evil spirits, in any place.

Jacob received the revelation of God by three means: in a dream, by a vision, and by words—the words that God spoke to him that night.

God had spoken previously to Abraham: "To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates . . ." (Genesis 15:18, RSV). The subsequent revelation spoken to Jacob was in strict accord with the revelation previously received by Abraham. That was an evidence of its validity. Supernatural revelations that contradict the Word of God—and they regularly occur—are not of God. They are borne in upon men by evil spirits, and they are meant to deceive. An account I read told of one such revelation that occurred in the Middle East, when a virgin figure appeared as by a vision in a

church and promised the enemies of Israel success in eradicating her.

There at Bethel, God spoke to Jacob: "I am the Lord, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and to your descendants. . . . Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done that of which I have spoken to you" (Genesis 28:13-15, RSV).

Bethel was the beginning of Jacob's personal knowledge of God. No longer was it by family tradition and teaching alone that he knew of God. Now he knew God for himself.

Later, at Peniel, Jacob was to experience a greater and more thoroughly transforming revelation of God that would alter his character permanently and cause his name to be changed, from Jacob (which means a supplanter, one who pushes somebody else aside), to Israel (which means prince with God).

This God who revealed Himself to Jacob at Bethel is the God who is. He identified Himself to Jacob as the God of Abraham, because that is exactly who He is. This was not because Abraham had been a religious genius or a masterful theologian, but because God had deliberately revealed Himself to Abraham, had made certain promises to him, and because Abraham had believed God and obeyed Him. The God of Abraham is the God who makes promises and keeps them.

This God of the Hebrews is the only true God. He is a living being, supreme above all others in the universe, Creator of all that is, the Author of life. All others who are worshiped by men as gods are either creatures of imagination or evil spirits seeking to usurp God's place among mankind.

"No man has seen God at any time," the Apostle John writes in 1 John 4:12 (κλν).

The Scriptures speak of God:

—as "the invisible God" in Colossians 1:15.

—as "the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God" in 1 Timothy 1:17.

—as "Him who is invisible" in Hebrews 11:27.

This passage in Hebrews says that "by faith Moses left Egypt, not being afraid of the anger of the king [Pharaoh]; for he endured as *seeing Him who is invisible*" (RSV).

God is "the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality and *dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has ever seen or can see*," 1 Timothy 6:15-16 (RSV).

Psalms 104:2 says that God covers Himself "in light as with a garment."

The Scriptures admonish men, "Let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, *for our God is a consuming fire*" (Hebrews 12:28-29, RSV).

"God is light and in Him there is no darkness at all," the Bible says in 1 John 1:5. It says also that "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Proverbs 9:10).

The Personal God

The God revealed by the Bible is a personal God, who reveals Himself to individual men. He deals directly and personally with women and men. He seeks them out to belong to Him. The Prophet Hanani told Asa king of Judah, "The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong in behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward Him" (2 Chronicles 16:9, KJV).

Adam, when he had sinned, tried to hide from God in Eden, but God found him there. Men, in their sin, seek to hide themselves morally from God. Some say that there is no God, and that gives them a temporary and delusive relief from concern over the consequences of their sins. Others tell themselves that God is very remote and unconcerned with man; that God set the universe in motion and then went off to some distant eyrie in the heavens to attend to matters far more important than the little affairs of men.

Scholars especially are prone to regard it as vanity that God would take any particular notice of men. Their supposition is that the God of the cosmos could not be a God interested in fine details. All of these are ways of declaring that man is free to sin and go his own way because God is blind to sin or so withdrawn from humanity as to be indifferent to individual acts.

The Bible gives the flattest possible contradiction to this. It states that "even the hairs of your head are all numbered" (Luke 12:7, RSV). The God who knows the number of the hairs of your head surely knows the number of the sins of your heart.

And the God who knows the number of your hairs also knows the number of the stars. "He tells the number of the stars; He calls them all by their names" (Psalm 147:4, KJV). Or, as Isaiah puts it, in majestic poetry: "To whom then will you liken Me, or shall I be equal?" says the Holy One. Lift up your eyes on high, and see: Who created these? He brings out their host by number; He calls them all by name. . . . Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, 'My way is hid from the Lord, and my right is disregarded by my God?'" (Isaiah 40:25-27, COM).

Here the Lord refutes the idea that His power over the creation takes His attention away from people on the earth.